



Embassy of the United States of America

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Contact: Boa Lee

Tel: 076 515 000

U.S. Ambassador Launches Embassy Youth Empowerment Initiative

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE – The United States Embassy continues to strengthen its relationship with Sierra Leonean youth by launching the Youth Empowerment Initiative (YEI). U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone Michael Owen congratulated the inaugural members of YEI at a ceremony at the U.S. Embassy on April 9.

YEI will assist the Embassy in designing and implementing youth programs and advise the ambassador and mission personnel on issues of importance to young people in Sierra Leone. YEI will work closely with youth-serving agencies, youth activists, government offices and leaders dealing with youth issues, and schools and universities.

Ambassador Owen said that supporting young people and elevating youth issues is a policy priority in the United States' bilateral and multilateral relationships. He pointed that the U.S. government wants to create environments for youth to have the opportunity to shine and realize their potential as citizens of the world. Ambassador Owen said the Embassy wants to ensure a two-way dialogue with young people and will work with YEI to be aware of and facilitate opportunities for young people to develop their skills and professional networks.

“It is important that youth see themselves as positive economic and political actors,” Ambassador Owen said. He said that investing in young people is a key U.S. foreign policy goal. He added that during U.S. President Barack Obama's visit last month with President Ernest Bai Koroma, Obama announced he intended to expand the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). YALI is a leadership and professional training program that brings youth leaders from Africa to the United States to enhance skills and meet U.S. counterparts.

Advisor for the YEI, Bockarie Ensah, said, “Any time a new youth development initiative is born, the hope of youths for a better future is rekindled.” Ensah thanked Ambassador Owen for the good initiative and for portraying Sierra Leone to the U.S. positively. He highlighted issues and program that the YEI intends to focus on in their quest to support youth development in the country.

U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Officer Boa Lee said the U.S. Embassy and the Public Affairs Section is excited about working with YEI and having an ongoing dialogue and relationship with the 21 members of YEI. Lee said that youth councils exist in approximately 60 U.S. embassies

around the world. She noted that they exist to directly connect U.S. embassies with young people to inspire positive change, incorporate youth voices in the embassy's work, amplify youth voices and issues, and to support youth-driven solutions to local and world challenges.

She said, "Most important, these youth councils are a reminder to us that the decisions we make have an impact that will likely outlive each of us. Young people will either reap the rewards of these decisions, or have to contend with the bad choices we make today."

The YEI consists of youth from throughout Sierra Leone. Several are U.S. Department of State exchange alumni, in- and out-of-school youth, and experienced youth workers. Members of YEI meet regularly to chart the way forward, sharing experiences and initiating ideas relevant to youth empowerment.

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